

The Arius Controversy

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The Christian religion stands apart from all other religions in that its God is a historical figure who, rather than exerting political authority like the personality cults in Rome or the deification of the Pharaoh, instead became a very personal God who continues to be celebrated vehemently to this day. At the center of this distinguished religion is the declaration of the Divine nature of its founder, Jesus Christ. Many believe that this has always been the case, and has never been contended within the church, only without. However, in the fourth century (C.E.) the church was in a state of turmoil in an effort to decide on this very fact. Many know the term “Heresy” with the connotation of being an enemy of the church, but the actual term, meaning opinion or choice, originally applied to all the philosophies derived from the teachings of Jesus. A clergyman named Arius epitomized this concept with his theories on the Trinity of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost. These theories threatened the very authority of the church, and were therefore combated at the highest levels. However, this does not mean that these had no basis on scripture or philosophical method. In fact, an analysis of Arianism will show that not only is it supported by other philosophical thinkers, but by the Canonized Gospels themselves. The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate the sophistication of Arius’ Christianity, and to demonstrate its validity as a truly Christian denomination.



In 256 C.E. a man named Arius was born in Libya. By this time, Christianity was still considered a minority. Emperor Constantine had not yet even issued his Edict of Milan at this time. This wouldn't come until 313 C.E. and, before this, Constantine was warring with his predecessor, Diocletian, who had outlawed Christianity.

It seems, though, that after this new religion became legally permissible, it suddenly wasn't clear what this religion was. Opinions and philosophies varied from one bishop to another and those that did not conform to the interpretation of those in power were called “Heresies”. At the heart of this controversy was Arius. The opening lines of Rowan Williams’ work state, “Arianism’ has often been regarded as the archetypal Christian deviation, something aimed at the very heart of the Christian confession.” (1987). The reason for this distress is that Arius denied the divinity of Jesus, which seemed to negate any affinity to Christianity at all.

It calls to one’s curiosity why this thinker would profess such seemingly self-contradictory doctrine and why this would be so threatening to the authorities. Con-

stantine himself did not see the relevance at first, chastising both Arius and his rival, Alexander, for "... raising such questions at all. They were mere debating points arising from misused leisure, results of intellectual exercises which should have been kept to oneself and not unadvisedly entrusted to the ears of the crowds." (Davis, 1983). It may be that Constantine did not want division among his people, as his political campaign was in pursuit of unification. Only after Constantine realized the theological undermining of his own "divine" authority did he begin to concern himself with the controversy.

The extent of the controversy is demonstrated in the very wording of the Nicene Creed. "And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the son of God was not... or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father]... the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them." (325 C.E.) This is a direct counteraction to the ideas of Arius, who theorizes, "... [Christ] 'was not' prior to his being generated by God's will." (Williams, 1987). This threatened the authority of the church by asserting that it's founder was *finite* and therefore fallible. "The essential feature of that creed was the safeguard against any denial of the Son's divinity which, it provided, through the explicit statement that the Son is homoousion, or consubstantial, with the Father; not of an essence dissimilar to that of the Father, or even of an essence merely similar, but of the same essence." (Sheldon, 1895).

The divine institution could then be challenged by other talented prophets, or especially the Jewish religion that claimed worship to the Father alone. "Accordingly they took another baptismal creed and altered its text, in the process creating a new, non-liturgical type of confession. At its end they added a short series of anathemas which directly condemned the basic propositions affirmed by the Arians." (Foutz, 1998).

This threat continued to influence church doctrine through the time of St. Augustine who carefully words his explanation of the Redemption of man. "For there is but one Son of God by nature, who in His compassion became Son of man for our sakes, that we, by nature sons of men, might by grace become though Him sons of God." (413 C.E.).

We even see its influence in modern theological controversy. Mormon theology is a prime example. "... I saw two personages... One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other – *This in My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (Smith, 1838). Other Christian institutions see this as a disqualification of the religions status as Christian. "The reason Mormonism is not Christian is because it denies one or more of the essential doctrines of Christianity. Of the essential doctrines (that there is only one God, Jesus is God in flesh, forgiveness of sins is by grace alone, and Jesus rose from the dead physically, the gospel being the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus), Mormonism denies three of them: how many gods there are, the person of Jesus, and His work of salvation." (Slick, 1996).

In order to shed light on this seemingly self-contradictory philosophy, it must be compared to other philosophies, religions, and cults. Analysis of the words attributed to Jesus must also be scrutinized.

The God of the Jews, Yahweh, to whom the Christians attribute the Father aspect of the Trinity, is well known for his wrath and seemingly irrational behavior. He is so far removed from humanity as result of his omnipotence and power that the fates of these creations of him seem of little worth unless they cease to worship. The story of Job illustrates this phenomenon. Job, the faithful servant of Yahweh, finds himself the object of a divine bet made between God and the Devil. His possessions, friends, and even family are taken away from him through all manner of calamities inflicted to demonstrate Job's faithfulness to Yahweh. When Job comes to God to beg for justice, rather than having mercy on his prophet, he comes down in a whirlwind to demonstrate his greatness and demands, "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding." (Job 38:1-4). A Christ of the same nature and substance as Yahweh would only compound this issue.

In many cases, Jesus as the Christ is also called the Mediator (Greek: μεσίτης *mēsītēs*). This suggests the idea of a go-between representing Divinity to man and man to Divinity. This idea is also demonstrated in Qabalistic philosophy. "In Tiphareth God is made manifest in form and dwells among us; *i.e.* comes within range of human consciousness. Tiphareth, the Son, 'shows us Kether' the Father... The Redeemer, then, manifests in Tiphareth and is forever striving to redeem His Kingdom by re-uniting it to the Supernals across the gulf made by the Fall, which separated the lower Sephiroth from the higher..." (Fortune, 1935). Also, "The Spiritual Experiences of [Tiphareth] are two in number instead of the usual one. This signifies that there are two sides to Tiphareth and indeed it is *par excellence* a linking Sephirah, reconciling the upper part of the Tree to the lower." (Knight, 1965).

In other words, because of the separation of consciousness between Yahweh and mortal men, a reconciling principal needed to be created. In Arius' Christianity, Jesus embodies this principal when he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). In Qabalistic tradition, the Spiritual experience of Kether, the Father Principle, is called the "Vision of Annihilation" because, "It is said that never while in incarnation can we rise to the consciousness of Kether in Atziluth and retain the physical vehicle intact against our return. Even as Enoch walked with God and was not, so the man that has the vision of Kether is disrupted so far as the vehicle of incarnation is concerned... If therefore we reproduce in ourselves the mode of being of that which has neither form nor activities, it follows that we must free ourselves from form and activity." (Fortune, 1935).

The notorious wrath of Yahweh, being mediated through the separate principle of the Christos, as a combination of Divine and the humane, turns to mercy for those who seek it. Upon the cross, Jesus begs the staying of the wrath of the Father by saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34). He even begs for his own sake, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42). The inferiority of the Christos to the God of

Creation, in this sense, is necessary for the sake of mankind to ensure not only its salvation but its survival.

Analysis shows that the threat of this controversy to the church has little or nothing to do with the ministry of Jesus, or even the concept of Salvation. The threat resides only in undermining the authority of those who came after its founder. This writer is unaware of any time in which Jesus is alleged to have claimed to be of the same nature of the Father, but there is a redundancy of his claiming to be rather the *conduit* to the Father. After all, Christianity's namesake told his disciples, "That *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:15-16).

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